

Friis, John

From: Kristin Bengtson Mendoza [bengtson.mendoza@yahoo.com]
Sent: Sunday, March 15, 2009 6:31 PM
To: Friis, John
Cc: eca_pace@yahoo.com; Caroline Rosenstone
Subject: HB6666, Section 5 KEEP ECA ALIVE!

Dear Mr. Friis,

Recently I learned the very upsetting news that the ACES Educational Center for the Arts is in danger of closing. I wholeheartedly urge you to do whatever you can to stop this. Please take the time to read on; I know that there are many other ECA alumni out there who share my sentiments.

I attended ECA and North Haven High School for four years and graduated from both schools in 2000. I was a student in the Poetry/Prose (Creative Writing) department at ECA. My experiences as a member of this unique learning community played a huge role in shaping my adolescent identity, and they set me on a course that led to the adult I am today. Nothing, save my immediate family, has had such a profound positive influence in my life.

My teachers at ECA were inspiring, caring professionals who loved the craft of writing as well as the craft of teaching. The teacher-practitioner model was an integral part of what made the community work. Our teachers had instant credibility in the eyes of jaded adolescents like me--they were out there in the creative world, unafraid to take risks and eager to share their passion with us. We went on meaningful field trips to New York and the former home of poet James Merrill. We worked hard preparing our own publications. We learned to mediate disputes and critique each others work in an empathetic, productive fashion. We staged readings and performances. We learned respect for other cultures and for students of other races, religions, sexual orientations, and economic means who we would not have encountered in our sending communities. And most importantly, we loved school. Our teachers and our beloved director at the time, Bob Parker, created an environment where being involved and excited about our work was cool. How many other high schools are really able to accomplish this?

ECA turned me around in many ways. If I hadn't had this experience, I doubt my North Haven High grades would have been as high as they were, and I wonder if I would have been inspired to go on to college at all (my parents did not). While my North Haven High guidance counselor did not even know my name, the counselor at ECA gave me extensive coaching and advice, and with her help I ended up attending Bennington College with a decent scholarship. My experiences at ECA prepared me to take part in academic life there, and after graduating, I was awarded the chance to be a Fullbright Scholar to Guatemala. Since then, I have worked as an employee of the Museum of Modern Art, and then as a New York City Teaching Fellow. I now have an MEd in TESOL and teach English as a Second Language in Brooklyn, New York, and I plan to get my PhD in the field of literacy or international education. I trace all these accomplishments and aspirations back to the times I spent with Caroline Rosenstone, Ted Deppe, Jamie Callan, and the other wonderful teachers I had the opportunity to spend my afternoons with back when I was a teenager.

If New Haven loses ECA, kids who are like I was will remain uninspired and unmotivated in school, and the creative sparkle of the city will diminish. Surely there is a way to make an exception to rigid rules that should not apply to such a unique place. Keep ECA's doors open and let its teachers there continue their important work.

Sincerely,

Kristin Bengtson Mendoza